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ABSTRACT

Four case studies of community programs in which the school is the central agent are presented. The role of specialist liaison personnel and their activities is highlighted. The first example is that of a cluster of schools that use school-based welfare officers to deal with common social problems in the community. The second case describes the programs offered by a large suburban school for the further education of minority parents. The third example is that of an inner city school, serving a transient migrant population of low-income parents, that has initiated a program to improve child rearing habits among the parents. The final case is that of a school endeavouring to overcome community disapproval by providing facilities for the public and by mounting a comprehensive public relations program. (JD)

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INTRODUCTION

This group of case studies resulting from the Burwood State College, Victoria, special project of the Schools Commission, rounds off for 1977 the collection from that source already published through the School and Community Project's publication, "School and Community News". We will continue to publish these in 1978.

While the enclosed four case studies cover a range of programs and settings, we would like to now draw attention to the common aspect of specialist liaison personnel and activities which act as a link between home and school to the benefit of all parties. This is especially evident in the cases of Doveton and Hawksburn; in a more diffuse way with the other two.

We encourage readers to use any of this material in local or organisational publications. Photographs and further back-up material are available through the School and Community project in Canberra.

Rosemary Hooke
Senior Research Officer

November 1977

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THE DOVETON CLUSTER OF SCHOOLS:

SCHOOL-BASED WELFARE OFFICER PROJECT

BY: David Pettit

1. SUMMARY

* Doveton is a predominantly Housing Commission neighbourhood east of Dandenong, Victoria.

* The Doveton "Cluster" was established in 1975 to co-ordinate the activities of the seven schools and the support/welfare agencies in the area to meet common needs exposed during the development of submissions for Schools Commission Disadvantaged Schools funding.

* The preparation of submissions exposed a variety of common social problems that the local welfare agencies were unable tc deal with. Subsequently, a cluster submission for two school-based welfare officers, to be shared amongst the schools and agencies, was funded by the Supplementary Grants program.

* This report focuses upon (i) the cluster, and (ii) the school-based welfare officers.

2. DEVELOPMENT OF AIMS AND FOCUS

(i) Prior to the Schools Commission Disadvantaged Schools (Supplementary Grants) Programs there had been limited, mainly sporting, liaison between schools in Doveton. In order to make funding submissions the schools had to reassess their programmes and the needs of their students. Some schools began to co-operate and became aware of common problems - truancy, high staff turnover, shortage of senior and experienced staff, little or no liaison between schools, and a lack of knowledge of the community. Originally five (now six) of the seven schools were classified 'disadvantaged' but, since all schools shared overlapping problems, co-operation was deemed essential irrespective of funding. Consequently the Catholic primary school, the three primary, two technical and one high school all became jointly involved in the cluster and its programs. As an outcome of the sharing some of the schools' individuality was merged into the cluster and a more conscious identification with Doveton developed.

The interest of schools in common projects developed a form of

community consciousness and an educational overview of the needs of Doveton children. This was emphasised by the increasing involvement of local support and welfare agencies which included the local community health centre, an 'open' rehabilitation centre for teenagers, the city welfare office, the Catholic school's social worker, and the Education Department's Counselling and Guidance Centre. They saw the cluster as

> more than a convenient grouping of schools to iron out a few inter-divisional problems. We saw it as only fulfilling its potential in the context of the surrounding social environment.

Their focus was different -- more upon the need for co-ordination of services to families because "we have children with an array of problems, all inter-related and acting on each other which are intimately related to family situations".

Previous experience had shown the fruitlessness of trying to treat children in isolation from the family. Both the schools and the agencies were aware of the repercussions upon the family of decisions made in the schools about individual children. The schools however had little awareness of any but tragic family backgrounds and even if they did, had little awareness of what to do or whom to ask for help.

(ii) The aims of the cluster schools to share information and offer support for each other has resulted in a variety of programmes. But the sheer task of co-ordination of seven schools and some six agencies, involving some 300 or so teachers and ancillary staff, some 60 welfare and support staff, and 4,000 students is enormous. The cluster therefore sought and obtained Schools Commission funding for the employment of two school-based welfare officers.

Doveton as a whole is not poorly provided with community and school resources but they have not been co-ordinated. The welfare officers' role is essentially liaison: to link and integrate schools and various agencies to meet the needs of children and schools. It encompasses both direct personal response to some individual child or family needs and referral, where appropriate, to welfare or support agencies. They advise teachers of students' home conditions so that decisions taken at school can be seen in context. They feed information back to the schools and welfare agencies and advise them what should and can be done to ameliorate conditions in the home to benefit the child. They are appointed jointly to all cluster schools and transfer information between them about families, children, programs, etc., at the same time promoting the cluster by their very existence.

3. PROGRAMMES

(i) The need for the welfare officers became apparent at the first seminar for all cluster schools and local community resource people. Called "Doveton Education 1976", it was the cluster's first major initiative. Teachers in primary and secondary schools talked to each other and to community resource people - councillors, parents, welfare officers - about problems they had in common. New teachers were introduced to the area and its people in a crash course run by local residents and teachers living in the area. Out of the seminar arose the focus for the continuing work of the cluster during the year. The day pinpointed the problems of transition from the Catholic and state primary schools to the secondary. It also became clear that curriculum methods, relationships with students, and teacher expectations varied considerably from school to school, which had a direct impact upon transition. Meetings were therefore held during the year where syllabi, aims and objectives, teaching methods, and evaluation procedures were discussed and a school workshop session held. The primary schools held night meetings with parents whose children were moving out of primary, at which secondary school respresentatives explained their organisation, career possibilities and system of pastoral care. This was before a choice had to be made. Literacy and numeracy workshops were held, learning materials exchanged between primary and secondary teachers and a testing programme implemented for transition grades. Information has been exchanged between schools about their courses and projects, and a complete skills workshop programme has been exchanged between the technical schools. Librarians have arranged a co-operative centralised bulk buying and distributing scheme. A great amount of visiting has taken place between schools and there have been student exchanges and exchanges between primary schools and kindergartens. Out of the 1977 seminar, held early in the year, developed the programmes for that year.

The local newspaper has a 'Schools Page' started at the cluster's suggestion which aims to explain the schools to the public. Parent bodies and specialist teachers contribute as have organisers of camps, excursions, art and craft and special programmes. In 1977 this has been reinforced by the cluster's own broadsheet for all teachers and parents, funded by the Schools Commission.

(ii) The two school-based welfare officers' work has been determined by the needs expressed by schools. These focus upon gathering and providing information for the teachers and welfare agencies, co-ordinating referrals and liaising with parents on behalf of the school. The welfare officers' work is unstructured and they operate in a low key and informal way to

facilitate their accessibility to staff and their ability to respond quickly to needs. They consider that:

> ... if we were to become specialists we would be structuring ourselves like the specialist agencies and people would not contact us. So we try to make ourselves the go-between.

A vice principal confirmed this:

> The school has been impressed by their promptness. They will look into a situation immediately despite the fact that they may be snowed under with other work prior to the call.

They have good access to parents because, as a principal says:

> The parents deal with too many people from authorities they resent: the girls don't belong to an authority. They give kindness and people respond. If they continue to work person to person, it's a big success story.

Their responsibility for deciding priorities from the demands placed on them calls for a high degree of professionalism in decision making; an excellent communication system and knowledge of, and acceptance by, all concerned in this semi-autonomous way of working.

Most of the welfare officers' time is taken up by acute casework. The information and advice that the welfare officers give meets teachers' needs for, "help to enable me to make the right decisions - I cannot leave school and visit homes: they can". Put another way by a teacher:

> I may need to have a child's family background and may, with a better understanding, develop a better relationship with a child.

To be able to put together a complete picture for the school or the welfare agencies demands an ability to tap into existing networks - school, welfare, medical, religious, employment, etc. - and to visit homes to fit in the missing details. What happens with the additional information is basically a redefinition of the problem for the teachers' benefit. As a welfare officer says:

> We are there to provide every possible alternative for a child at risk; we have to keep looking at alternatives.

One result of this, as a principal explains, is that:

> The welfare officer gives us greater credibility in what we're suggesting to staff. They can make a recommendation based upon close knowledge of the lad and family, after visiting the home. The staff will listen to it.

This doesn't, as the same principal comments, alter the responsibility for decision making:

> ... she listens to my point of view and works along with it. I don't feel, by calling her to help in a case, I have to opt out or lose control.

Most of the problems that the welfare officers deal with result from students' inability to conform to the school's norms where these differ considerably from those of the home. Although they do handle many personal problems, most are referred to the appropriate specialist agencies. A lot of their work is with a hard core of multiple problem families already known to the local government agencies and here the work is mainly rationalisation. Thus a problem may occur initially at the 'difficult' 13 or 14 year age, become linked to a sister or brother in another technical school, and be found to involve different problems with younger relations in a primary school. One or more of the family may be involved already with specialist agencies and so the linking may take up to 20 visits to the children, parents, and welfare personnel concerned and all the time there is constant feedback to the schools. In many cases, the welfare officers' actions may defuse a critical case but any continuing amelioration is dependent upon the home conditions.

Not all problems are as complex, serious or insoluble. One child in school was reported for 'disruptive behaviour': it proved to be a disarming ability to mime teachers which reduced the class to hysterics. The welfare officer tells how:

> I went home to mum and I saw immediately where John got it from. She was a brilliant mime herself and kept me in fits. She told me that she went to school to get John's report and had to suppress her own laughter as she recognised John's teacher from his mime ... I did explain the seriousness of John's actions - the school was going to suspend him - and she saw the point. John's miming now takes place out of the classroom.

4. RESPONSIBILITY FOR INITIATIVES

The stimulus for co-operation through a cluster structure originated in the need to prepare a submission for the Supplementary Grants fundings along Schools Commission guidelines. Thus 'openness' and 'school-community interaction' were two of the basic themes of the seminars and of the schools' individual submissions. The schools, needing information and help, had to go beyond their boundaries to local government and private interest groups.

Much of the impetus for the cluster developments arose from the

original working party from the schools and, in particular, the work of Ron Major, a senior teacher and later chairman of the committee, and two principals - one primary, Max Walker - and one secondary, Eric Bawden. Later, Tim Eltham, the social planner for the city of Berwick, was important in offering support to, and involvement by, local government in the cluster, in encouraging co-ordination of resources and in the employment of the school-based welfare officers. John Smith of 'Grassmere', the teenage rehabilitation centre, was another key person with welfare expertise which was so valuable to the cluster. This nucleus was later expanded and much of the work sub-divided.

5. RESPONSIBILITY FOR DEVELOPMENT

With the foundation of the cluster committee, the responsibility for development became more widespread but much of the initiative still comes from the original nucleus.

A major change has been the input of the welfare officers who possess a unique overview of the nature of problems and pressures facing teachers. Their awareness of the unreality for some Doveton children of some of the schools' expectations has led them to question the appropriateness of some facets of school organisation, teacher expectations, and decision making. Their access to information and support, and ability to offer problem re-definition continues to change the teachers' perspective, especially that of senior or pastoral care staff with whom they are most frequently in contact.

6. STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES

(i) The 'cluster committee' has two representatives from each school and from the welfare or support agencies and the Catholic school's social worker. It meets frequently and creates ad hoc and special sub-committees as necessary. For example, the special welfare officer selection sub-committee was composed of welfare and school people who had lived or worked in the area for at least three years. Much of the development work is done by smaller informal groups and tested at general cluster committee meetings.

(ii) The welfare officers are directly responsible to the cluster committee, who is their employer, and they make monthly reports. To obviate overlap, duplication, and role conflict they meet every fortnight with other welfare organisations as the 'welfare co-ordinating committee', which also co-ordinates a lot of the case work begun since the previous meeting. The committee, established as a result of the welfare officers' appointment, has improved communication between the welfare and support agencies and

between them and the schools. It is also responsible for clarifying responsibility for families who have had contact with more than one agency.

But most of the time the welfare officers operate informally:

> Now that we've become accepted and known in the area, it's not so much putting ourselves on committees. We're part of the established networks and if anything comes up, we'll be there.

Time is spent on staff development, explaining their roles to teachers at staff meetings or with pastoral care groups, at form meetings, in-service days, and weekend seminars. Again, the informality:

> We are seen in the staff rooms talking to people the whole time collecting information, giving information.

They try to improve the teachers' ability to deal with problems before they need referral. They have also become resource people outside the cluster and in pre-service education in teachers' colleges.

For the outside welfare agencies they are their 'eyes' in the schools, informally testing attidues, facilitating contact with the appropriate person and gauging the general atmosphere. For many support services, schools are closed cultures, unknown, isolated, and operating in complete autonomy. Yet now:

> [the welfare officers] offer agencies working with Doveton families a constructive entry into the school and a mediating influence upon the action of the school staff.

Because of the contacts, formal or informal:

> We have learnt more about the complexity of the school and the unique imperatives faced by teachers.

7. THE PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED

(i) The seven schools have some 260 teachers, nearly 4,000 children and serve a total population of some 6,000 people. In the same way that support for the schools is not unanimous among the students, support for the cluster is not unanimous among the principals and teachers.

The support, or at any rate lack of objection, of principals is ciritical for success. Principals are extremely influential people who verge on autonomy in the operation of their schools. They are not used to voluntarily subordinating their authority or sharing resources. There is variety in the extent to which they wish to be involved in the cluster. It is not rare for there to be jealousy of other principals, to feel they are not getting a 'fair share' and for them to feel slighted if junior

staff have greater responsibility in cluster affairs, which happens. They could pull a school out of the cluster quite independently of the wishes of teachers, school council or parents. Their attitudes to welfare officers influence those of their staff and vitually control their effectiveness: in 1976 two principals effectively isolated the welfare officers from their teachers. In 1977, the threat posed to at least one principal by the unstructured operation of the welfare officers led him to restrict their access to his school and lessened the cluster's overall cohesiveness and effectiveness. The general attitude of the principal to cluster co-operation is a fairly acid test of the degree of commitment to the Schools Commission criteria of 'openness' and 'community involvement'. A token acceptance, a 'going through the hoops', for funding purposes can stand in stark contrast to ongoing performance.

The general concept of cluster co-operation is well supported by 90 per cent of the teachers, but opinion is more divided about how this concept is best implemented and the satisfaction with moves taken so far. The same is true of the attitude to the welfare officers whose work is almost 100 per cent supported by staff but some of whom either feel their concerns are not met or they have not had enough contact.

The high turnover of staff in Doveton, approximately a quarter every year, poses problems for the cluster and the welfare officers. Each time a new principal is appointed, and there were four in 1977, the welfare officers have to establish a new working relationship: the same is true of staff. This militates against their effectiveness.

Few teachers or welfare workers have experience of selecting staff. This the cluster committee had to do when it selected the two welfare officers. One of the original welfare officers was incapable of working on her own initiative and was later dismissed: whether the selection committee could have been expected to predict this is problematical.

Doveton has a geographical focus and apparent social homogeneity that originally led to assumptions about local cohesiveness and corporate identity on which the cluster was hoping to capitalise. If communal homogeneity does exist it has proved extremely difficult to capitalise for any really tangible outcome. It is the quality of the personal relationships and sense of commitment to the concept which determines the extent of the cluster's operational efectiveness rather than any vague idealism of 'community'.

(ii) The welfare officers' main problem is self-inflicted: it is their undoubted success in relieving the schools of some of the pressures of

problems which are beyond their capacity to cope with. A lot of their actions do not 'solve' but they do ameliorate or defuse problems for students, parents, and schools alike and with each success comes increased demands.

Many early teething problems related to the very novelty of the welfare officers' work. A lot of explanation and promotion had to be carried out with staff and, in particular, senior and pastoral care staff with whom the officers have most contact. The onus was heavily upon the welfare officers to establish their professional integrity which they could finally do only after being trusted by senior staff and by providing successful feedback. This is difficult in an area where most cases are long term.

Because each school was administered differently, the machinery for referral of students had to be clarified and the schools had to develop their own internal 'filtering' system to meet their individual needs. Thus the welfare officers are largely captive to the distinctive and different role created for them in liaison with each school: the potential for misunderstanding is high and the suppliant role is not one which can be born indefinitely for self-respect.

Another potential problem is that "two into seven won't go" without very clear procedures. The officers are <u>both</u> available to <u>all</u> schools. They spend a week at a time in different schools which, when associated with the need to 'drop everthing' in the case of emergency, places a strain on their accessibility. Some schools, especially primary, feel that they are not getting their 'fair share' of the welfare officer 'cake'. The majority of the cases do originate in the 'difficult' lower forms of the secondary schools which is inevitable if a curative rather than a preventative approach is used.

A lot of cases handled by the welfare officers require continuous overview over a long period of time because they are family-based problems which have implications for several children in many schools over a number of years. The need for annual evaluation and submissions for continued funding for programmes of this nature puts an unreasonable pressure upon both the welfare officers and the cluster committee. The basis of Schools Commission funding for projects like this, which impose extremely poor career prospects and have low job security for professional people, badly needs reassessing in view of the long term nature of the work they perform.

8. <u>FACTORS IN SUCCESS OF THE PROGRAMME</u>

(i) Doveton is somewhat different from the vast amorphous suburban sprawl

to the east of Melbourne in that it is fairly distinctive geographically, is predominantly Housing Commission and was built before the surrounding areas. It does have an indefinable group identity which, although it is difficult to utilise for a specific purpose, as we have seen, does give a sense of place and belonging to people working and living there.

Access to funds through the Supplementary Grants programme and the developmental philosophy of the Schools Commission stimulated the initial co-operation between schools and, later, with local government welfare organisations. Co-operation did not have to happen: schools could quite easily have gone their own way with their separate programmes: to some extent they have in their individual programmes. The success factor was the catalysts, the individuals whose initiative led to the development of the concept of 'cluster' and 'co-operation'. Their action was not and is not without opposition. There are some teachers and perhaps principals whose aim has been and is to use the grant money to produce 'more of the same' education in massive and splendid isolation often because co-operation is seen as a threat to their autonomy: this is a small minority. The support for the concept amongst welfare and support staff is almost unanimous, mainly because of their experience of the benefits of the school-based welfare officers.

(ii) The acknowledged success of the welfare officer programme has been due to the personality and enthusiasm of the welfare officers and to the proven value of their work. They are cheerful people, not prone to conflict, with the ability to listen to people and to work in unstructured and insecure conditions. The crucial importance of the personality of the individual officers was high-lighted when one of the earlier appointees was found to be completely unsuitable. It says much for the value of locally-based decision making and autonomy that, having been found unsuitable, that person could be dismissed: responsible action like this is almost impossible with central office appointments.

The welfare officers are the visible evidence of the viability of the cluster. Their success is a critical factor in the value attached to the cluster as a means of improving the context of education in Doveton. It is based upon tangible benefits that they have been able to deliver to both the schools and the families through their information gathering, disseminating and co-ordinating role, and practical help.

The most important factors in their success have been their accessibility and their practical, constructive help to the schools.

The officers would claim they are accessible because they are school-based:

> we're in and out of schools all the time and the teachers and kids can always grab us,

and to their lack of structure. The schools are unanimous that what they do is both necessary and valuable:

> I don't know what we'd do without them ... We'd do less than we should with the kids and that's not just a glib answer.

The effect on the teaching staff is a critical factor because, "psychologically it lifts the strain off the staff: they know there is another resource". They have created total family 'pictures' through their contacts between schools and with families:

> I've found them a great help, especially when there is a need to work with families where children are attending different schools.

The value of their work being 'school-based' is further emphasised by their co-operation with other support and welfare agencies. They work for the agencies, in the schools, interpreting, explaining and gathering information and directing outsiders to the appropriate contact. As a social worker said:

> They facilitate - they're there in the school system - it's like another culture. I can now relate to another person inside the system who is also dealing with the child.

In return, the professionalism of the welfare and support staff with whom they liaise, especially the Psychology and Guidance centre and the Catholic social worker, is itself a key to the success.

By unstructured and informal organisation, integration into the local networks, and freedom to respond and set priorities at the local level, the 'cluster' and its two 'school-based welfare officers' are helping realise the potential of the concept.

9. FUTURE

(i) The future of the cluster will depend heavily upon the enthusiasm and commitment of the unpaid, unsung cluster committee and its assistants. It will depend upon the extent to which the sense of partnership and responsibility to the children and people of Doveton expressed by teachers can be maintained by those with vision against the restricted isolationism of others. Co-ordinating the cluster committee's activities and meetings is very demanding and the appointment of a part-time secretary/organiser to

the cluster or a part-time teaching release would be highly desirable. Additional work is planned to develop structures which can be used to turn the seminar discussions and shared knowledge into improved learning facilities and methods for the students. This is particularly true of basic literacy and numeracy skills where co-operative evaluation of presently funded programmes is proposed with further in-service work.

(ii) The cluster's future effectiveness depends to a large degree upon the continued funding of the welfare officers who are the visible proof of its existence. They are threatened by the insecurity of Schools Commission funding. Their future initiatives and sense of responsibility in responding to needs in such an unstructured position is extremely important. So is the nature of the schools' responses. As the level of understanding and recognition of the nature of the problems grows so will demands change for the type of skills required of the welfare workers. A particular problem is that the degree of understanding will always vary from school to school and from teacher to teacher, throwing pressure back on the officers. Any decrease in the appropriateness and effectiveness of their actions would be bound to reflect on the cluster; their successful initiatives are likewise vitally important.

H A W K S B U R N - A COMMUNITY CENTRE FOR PARENTS

BY: Ron Fitzgerald
David Pettit

1. DISTINCTIVE ASPECTS

* large state primary school in an inner suburb of Melbourne with a separate community centre in its grounds and a community education programme for parents and other citizens.
* disadvantaged area with large ethnic group, especially Greek; many residents of local Housing Commission flats.
* use of teacher aides to visit homes, run the community centre and assist teachers in the classroom.
* use of parents and other citizens as volunteers to help in the school and community centre.

2. PROGRAMMES FOR INTERACTION BETWEEN SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY

The programmes at the community centre involve:

i) a craft group whose members exchange ideas and skills;
ii) a working group, which began in the teachers' staffroom, and do such things as prepare international dishes;
iii) an informal study group whose members work at practical problems in human relations;
iv) migrant English and basic literacy classes and tutorials;
v) mothers reading stories in other languages to children in classrooms;
vi) local high school students help at the centre and sixth grade children at Hawksburn. Each adopts one preparatory grade pupil to see if they have anything to contribute to one another.

Other activities include sex education films and talks, class parties with an informal blend of staff, children, and their mothers as well as regular volunteer mothers; after-school activities, Greek school, meetings and private functions.

As many as 74 people make use of the centre on any one day. For example, illiterate mothers may come to be taught to read; lonely mothers may simply be seeking companionship; a single mother who was afraid to go to hospital lest her children be put into state institutions successfully sought child-minding help from other parents. Much of the success of the

centre has stemmed from the general welcoming attitude of the school to parents and the informality of the centre, particularly the acceptance of mothers without making demands upon them or structuring their time.

Programme of home visits by teacher aides

Special funds made available by the Schools Commission under its scheme of aid for disadvantaged schools have enabled Hawksburn to employ eight part-time teacher aides. Four of them are parents of children at the school.

Following futile attempts to seek responses from parents by means of circulars (only six out of 600 sent were returned), it was decided to introduce a programme of home visits by teacher aides. Initial scepticism about the value of such visits soon vanished as a result of the positive responses met. One mother burst into tears and said, "Do you mean really, could I honestly come along? I've lived here for six years and I don't know anyone".

Many mothers do not really know why they have come to the centre. But they appreciate the security of having their children nearby. "The children are very much part of their parents being there and belonging in schools." Parents are encouraged to think of the centre as their facility. "The community room is everybody's room. Chinese, Greek, Spanish - all sorts of folk - mix here on different occassions" and share "a feeling of belonging together".

3. SOURCE OF INITIATIVE AND INTERACTION

A small group of teachers at Hawksburn shared the opinion that:

> There was obviously something wrong at the school. We didn't feel that we were teaching badly. But neither the children nor we could explain to parents what was going on. There were obvious gaps between the parents' hopes and expectations and what the school was delivering. There were areas of conflict that weren't even being identified. We were just ignoring them. That didn't satisfy us and so in trying to get through to parents, we followed unconsciously the various steps that have since been traced out for us.

The publication of the Karmel report on Australian schools in 1973 and subsequent setting up of the Schools Commission, provided a framework of ideas and organisation in which the small group of teachers could take initiatives. Their leader, Philea Polites, born in Australia of Greek parents, encouraged her colleagues to seek a special grant from the Schools Commission in order to employ teacher aides whose duties, among other things, were to include community activities. In 1975, when the grant was made, the school had only a few migrant teachers.

Under its new principal and the project's steering committee, the school had already started to welcome parents. This stance was in contrast to the previous situation where "at lunch-time parents could be seen sitting on nearby street gutters putting chips and various other things straight into the mouths of little ones". The programme of welcoming gestures included a dinner dance, concerts and multi-lingual circulars to parents. But a lack of back-up to these organised activities led to a disappointing response.

Then, in a combined effort, some teachers and parents purchased a demountable hut and erected it as a community centre in the school grounds. This facility, coupled with the special funds to employ eight teacher aides, helped to create a more favourable context for successful action. One of these aides, Ann Whyte attended a state conference on community involvement and brought back new perspectives and a better understanding of their situation. She perceived the need for the school to take account of local cultures, that is, all of the influences in the children's lives. She realized that it was vital for parents to understand the purpose of the programme.

In sharing this common belief, the teacher aides took several initiatives. For example, they sought to enlist the services of parent volunteers through a scheme of home visits. At first, they took small multi-national groups of children with them in order to 'break the ice'. However, the children dominated the proceedings and the group approach was abandoned in favour of a solo effort by the aides.

With the aides acting as intermediaries, a rapid spread of community involvement developed in 1976. Classes for adults were started in the day-time to complement night-time sessions. They included courses in Greek conversation which some of the teachers also entered. The discovery that two parents could neither read nor write led to the centre giving them help.

The employment, in 1977, of two community workers in the community centre has enabled the range of activities to be extended. These programmes are geared to lend support to parents in the light of needs uncovered by aides during their home visits. As a result, the number of parent groups has grown to six. The drop-in centre exhibits multi-lingual notices and buzzes with friendly conversation. As a member of staff has remarked:

> When you walk through the school you notice that as a result of our efforts, there is a bit of a glow. Previously, you would see the friendly faces; now you get more than that. You get parents who are not only willing to smile at you, but also argue with you.

4. FOCUS AND AIMS OF THE PROGRAMME

In mounting the programme of home visits, for those at the centre the main focus has been on parent involvement in their children's schooling. As the project's chairman, Bernard Parsons, Deputy Principal at Hawksburn, points out:

> It's not just getting parents involved because for the parent's sake it must have an educational background and justification... It was a genuine experiment. I was asking them [the teachers] to go into areas where they felt a great deal of ignorance and diffidence ... now, as well, to take people [the teacher aides] away from a room and send them out visiting for a nebulous result is quite a thing to ask, and I had to justify it in terms of a benefit to the child in the classroom that was clearly seen.

A positive response from parents visited has therefore been crucial to the programme's acceptance by members of staff. Only 14 out of over 100 approached have failed to become involved in some way with the school. The big majority have either come along to give help or ask for help or just come along.

Changes in the school curriculum have enabled parents to understand more easily their children's lessons. Teachers like Philea Polites judged the curriculum to be "too academic" and sought to provide more appropriate learning experiences for children who "were very immature in certain areas ...". The alternative courses introduced put a high priority on the acquisition of such skills as the use of the telephone directory, talking to shopkeepers, not getting lost in a supermarket, understanding the tally at the supermarket check-out, and mixing and matching numbers with articles. Also included are newspaper readings and a touch of media education. Special concern is paid to developing sound inter-personal relationships among the various actors - students, teachers, and parents. Children are also taught to use a library and understand its value.

Home visits by teacher aides are intended to build bridges with families who are inclined to view teachers as distant people. As a result, teachers tend to elicit different responses from parents of the following kind:

> ... the Greeks and Turks are very respectful. They bow, they say 'Sir', and they smile. In their tradition the teacher is a very honoured person ... But to an aide they can pour out their feelings as to an equal.

Having won the trust of mothers, the aides are well-placed to help them understand particular ways in which they can help their children to succeed at school. According to Ann Whyte.

> ... it's through our program that the mothers who don't know why you should listen to a child reading at home - and they don't read notes about it - will very slowly, through being included into this, begin to learn and understand the importance of doing things like that.

In these ways parents are encouraged to participate in their children's education.

5. STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES

More open structures within the school are meant to complement more interactive processes in the parents' centre. The new principal, Philip Clerici, places a heavy emphasis on giving parents a clearly recognized place in the school. As he observes:

> .. when I first came here, people hurried through the playground and didn't want to speak to you... now there are large numbers of parents - up to a hundred - who come and help in the school.

Much stress is put on informal relationships. Within a more welcoming approach adopted a year previously, the principal and staff started to invite people who were standing about at the infant school assembly "to have a cup of coffee and a chat". As a result the school began to appear a less hostile place. "A lot of people do come into the school building to talk or wait. They're not frightened at all."

In the principal's view, no limits apply to the process of consultation. "We want people", he states, "to talk about the school's curriculum and the school programme in general ...". But so far only a few people have taken the opportunity. These parents - they are mostly on the School Council - "are talking about the bi-lingual teaching and probably wouldn't mention it before ... probably thought we ought to have it. But now they are game enough to say, 'Well, can we do something about it?'"

These initiatives are perceived as steps towards more carefully worked out approaches at the local level. The principal envisages joint efforts being made by parents and teachers in constructing an appropriate school programme. His tone is optimistic.

> I think the climate's sort of set now for people to perhaps accept the role that they can make our curriculum belong to this school rather than just be a state-wide curriculum imposed on Hawksburn ... I think the staff have got to look at the curriculum not just from their own angle, but also from the people who are becoming interested in making suggestions or having a say in it.

The proceedings of the school council indicate, in the principal's opinion, a more reflective process of policy-making. Within what he sees as an evolutionary process, his detailed reports on school operations provide greater scope for the present representatives to ask questions. Structures and processes within the parents' centre are informal and flexible. Home visits have revealed loneliness to be the most common problem. How to get these lonely people to meet their own needs has been the major task. Most - when asked what they want to do - say knitting or crocheting. In practice, the craft serves as the excuse for social interaction. As members of a small craft group, mothers can ask for assistance or just sit and do nothing. Some have accepted invitations to help in the classroom.

6. MAJOR RESPONSIBILITY FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Cast largely in the role of parents helping other parents, teacher aides bear the day-to-day responsibility for developing contacts with the local community. At the start of the home-visiting programme, the teachers were inclined to select problem families for visiting. As a result the aides found "some very heart-breaking and to them almost nightmarish conditions, where there is a tradition of prostitution, or at least amateur prostitution, or a series of uncles or illiteracy or incompetence and inability to organise a life-style that was healthy for the child". The programme was reorganized to provide for visits to a cross-section of parents, both to take the strain off the aides and to mobilise support for the voluntary help schemes.

A special concern - already indicated - has developed towards isolated and lonely people. Some have a record of failure and are frightened of institutional help. Their wretched situation is described as follows:

> We found that there were people who would sit in a block of flats and just gaze out at the school grounds. Having sent the child to school mum would sit there watching the school grounds and wait all day for the child to come home. No communication with anyone at all.

These mothers look for a shoulder to cry on. The task of the aides is to win the trust of these parents and induct them into an informal self-educating programme.

This group of lonely and frightened people is distinguished from another group of parents who are more confident and self-directed. The latter want to have meetings and do things and join the Parents and Friends

Association (P & F A). They fit into the framework of school organisation very well. A far less formal approach is followed with those people who are 'terrified' of organisation. Opportunities are created for them "to help one another and talk to one another and sit in the sun together; come along and make coffee and tea. Just be there!"

7. PROBLEMS AND ATTEMPTED SOLUTIONS

* Trial and Error Approach

In a school formerly given to the traditional policy of excluding parents, the introduction of parent involvement and participation has meant basic or structural changes in relationships. No clear framework of ideas or theory has been developed. Attempts to apply a fundamentally new principle have therefore been made without sufficient information and planning. On the other hand, a programme of systematic interaction with parents has taken a neighbourhood public school into largely unexplored territories for teachers. In the absence of clear guidelines based on sound empirical research undertaken in different cultural settings, the staff at Hawksburn have been virtually obliged to review procedures in the light of first-hand experience and advice given by special consultants appointed by the Education Department under the Disadvantaged Schools Program.

* Divisions among Staff

The initiatives for the parents' centre came from a small number of teachers. According to one of their leaders, perhaps only 10 out of the 50 members of staff are totally committed to the project. Among the majority diverse attitudes remain evident. The project got underway with strong support from the infant department of the school. After five to six months, upper school teachers who had come to perceive some benefits in the scheme also made requests for home visits to their students' families. But a special staff seminar held in March 1977 revealed a great deal of latent hostility among teachers who felt they could not openly citicise a project which had become a 'sacred cow'. They felt that the parents' centre catered for everybody but teachers. They expressed alarm at the extension of their role to become community educators. As the project's co-ordinator commented:

> It became clear that if the community centre wished to promote new initiatives in the community then it would have to do this itself.

In response to the evident sense of disquiet, the seminar agreed to set up three groups by which teachers can study school-home relationships.

The specific subjects for analysis are -

(i) health education - extending right into the home.

(ii) parents as a resource - how to best use and train them and how their work could be extended.

(iii) the child and the curriculum - a more theoretical approach particularly concerned with problems met in multi-cultural education. What are the implications for migrant children and their parents and teachers; how can multi-cultural programmes be fitted into the school curriculum?

About six out of every 10 teachers are associated with one of the three groups. Some three or four of the older members of staff evince a total lack of interest.

Open criticism of the parents' centre was muted but the issue seems likely to provoke spirited debate when the convenors of the three groups report on the implications of groups' decisions for the centre.

* Division among parents:

There are two parent groups both with basic interests in the school: the informal Community Centre Group threatened by the formal structures and the more efficacious formal P & F A who contribute a lot financially although they are numerically smaller. As Bernard Parsons says:

> It is unfortunate that their expertise is not directed towards the community centre and remains unharnessed for it. They just grow separately: it crystalised that way. It's a shame.

This situation is exacerbated by the poor communications between the School Council and the community centre which has resulted in some personal antipathy. The School Council - the 'official management body' feels left out and "one member even went knocking on the centre's door - I said, 'Nobody knocks; it belongs to everybody'".

* Large Enrolment

A neighbourhood school with over 800 students faces formidable difficulties in trying to implement a general policy of parent participation. Such large numbers have made it impossible for the aides to visit the majority of homes within a highly mobile population. Moreover, among a staff of 50 teachers who have come together largely by chance under a centralised system of appointments, basic differences in educational philosophy and personal values are likely to emerge in a situation marked by structural change. Under circumstances which do not permit an implicit consensus to go unchallenged, the principal has the onerous task of trying to maintain co-operative and cohesive behaviour from his staff. It remains to be seen

whether a large neighbourhood school within a centralised school system can continue to pursue alternative goals in face of dissent and disquiet among its teachers. Complementary changes in the administrative system and organisation of schools may be needed.

* Lack of Professional Training:

Members of staff - both teachers and teacher aides - have received no formal training in community education. Characteristically, the professional concerns and techniques of teachers are limited to the classroom. As one member of staff said:

> ... teachers have to be educated to understand what it is about, the whole ethos of community education ... It's a very alarming and delicate situation really.

A similar viewpoint was expressed by a teacher aide who commented:

> There are a lot of dangers. There can be the danger that we [the aides] can be viewed as interfering with the children they're teaching and their contact with that child's family ...

Because comprehensive structures have yet to be created and respective roles defined and accepted some teachers fear loss of control and autonomy in the classroom.

> This situation is exacerbated when very competent, well-educated teacher aides pick up and effectively use teacher jargon to talk to them on their own terms. It effectively tarnishes some of the mystique.

The role of the teacher aides also remains vague and uncertain. No formal structures exist by which the school can readily cope with parents' demands. Hence, the decision to deploy resources to the task of home visiting created doubt and anxiety among the staff. On one hand teachers who are not trained in social welfare look for someone to make contacts for them. On the other hand, teacher aides must guard against operating as amateur welfare officers. But in practice they often find themselves awkwardly placed. For example:

> ... an advantage and disadvantage is that the mothers confide all too readily and too much and we very quickly get to the stage where I wonder whether it is relevant or correct to go back to the teacher with all of the details. Yet if I was a teacher, I know I would want to be aware of the families' problems.

As a result, the aides take care not to undertake what could be called social welfare work. Instead they offer "friendship, certainly sympathy, total sincerity". In cases where professional advice is called for, the

aides contact social workers and other help.

* Suspicious and hostile Attitudes

The project got under way with little support by either teachers or parents. Only a few members of both groups took the initiative to procure and set up a demountable hut as the parents' centre. As already shown, doubts about the centre still remain with some teachers.

Many parents evince hostile attitudes towards the school. For women who lack money, friends, and self-esteem, teachers often appear to be 'the epitome of success' - a feeling of 'she's everything and I'm nothing'. In these cases the aides face a difficult task in trying to reduce the sense of social distance and antagonism. As one of them complained:

> And I spend most of my time in convincing them school isn't bad; teaching is a really hard job; teachers are really nice; and trying deliberately to make her correspond with the teacher ...

Sometimes the aides manage to convince parents that the school is able and wants to help them. Teachers, too, stand to benefit. In the words of an aide:

> ... when it works well ... it's brilliant. We are just a second arm for the teacher. You can do a lot of the slog and leg work that a teacher can't possibly fit into a teaching day.

* Language Difference:

Many Greek parents, in particular, want to take part in school activities but feel very frustrated because their lack of English prevents them from joining in conversations and meetings. One solution has been for the Greek community to send two people along to the School Council and they report back to the group. Also, the introduction at the centre of evening language classes for family groups has provided the opportunity for migrants to educate themselves as to the workings of the school within their own language framework.

8. FACTORS IN ACHIEVING SUCCESS

* Change of Principal:

Where formerly parents generally felt excluded from the school, the advent of a new principal led to a policy of open access. As one teacher observed:

> As soon as the principal changed there was a total change in the school atmosphere. People would come to school with a smile on their face; the office door was open, you could just walk in ...

The new principal opened up many outlets for involvement.

* Closeness of the main Change-agent to the Community:

Philea Polites, who inspired the project and acted as its co-ordinator, built up an extensive network of contacts with local Greek families. She moved out of a distant middle class suburb to reside in the district where (outside of her duties as teacher) she acted as interpreter, tax consultant, and hospital visitor for accident cases. As she says, "the kids knew me and the parents knew me and I was some sort of figure of security". Hence, Greek parents have a familiar point of reference at the school.

* Bridge-building between School and Home:

The work of the teacher aides, already described, has done much to bridge for many parents the gap between themselves and teachers. The following account of more positive responses by parents is given by the project leader:

> The parents who come in are increasing ... People outside the school are saying, 'You have a drop-in centre and I like what you are doing. Can you tell me about it? If we sent along someone, someone who needs a friendly place to come to, can they come along and be there?'. They are wanting to use the centre as therapy.

Because of the heavy and constant emotional workload experienced by the teacher adies, the case for the centre having a full-time administrator has now been recognised.

* Use of Volunteer Mothers:

A volunteer training course conducted by a social worker/teacher was started by Hawksburn in conjunction with five other local schools. Volunteer mothers completed an eight week low-key training course. They continue to meet and now operate under their own direction. The scheme has already been implemented successfully in two neighbouring primary schools. Teachers and school councils are behind the scheme because they have been fully involved in the planning and are aware of the issues. The scheme has been successfully transferred without the Hawksburn 'bugs' and this is of terrific significance.

* Links between the School and Local Helping Services:

The programme of home visits has uncovered needs which can be catered for by local resources and helping facilities. Parents are informed about and referred to local welfare agencies, hospitals, health centres, and so on. To cite one example: the federal Department of Social Security may be contacted regarding a pension, or the local city council about home help. In return, a Greek mother from the school may be requested to read stories at the library, and elderly ladies from the health centre may be invited to the community centre to hear readings.

* Improved Relationships with Students:

Better flow of information about children and their cultures and closer interaction with parents both directly and indirectly through the aides have enabled teachers to come to know their students and understand the particular difficulties they face in everyday life. The use of volunteer parents in the classroom to hear reading and perform similar tasks has also served to encourage and support children at risk. In some cases remarkable changes in students' behaviour have occurred. For example, one little girl had not spoken to her teachers for the whole time of her first year at school nor during the first two terms of the following year. Then, in August, a break-through took place during an individual reading session with a volunteer mother who heard the child's first words in school. Teachers realise that more subtle changes in the behaviour of other students have gone unnoticed.

9. FUTURE PLANS

The approach adopted at Hawksburn has already been extended to other schools in the district. The five primary schools whose students transfer to the local high school and the technical school have formed an association to develop present involvement and to carry on the programme of home visits throughout the seven schools, along the Hawksburn lines. Teacher aides newly appointed on a part-time basis will join their more experienced colleagues as a part of a task force. Although currently funded through a scheme of supplementary grants made available by the Schools Commission, the program is intended to become self-supporting.

With regard to the future of the parents' centre at Hawksburn, Philea Polites advises against taking on too much too quickly. She says:

> I didn't want to see it pushed too quickly just because it happens to be a prototype or just because it happens to be up to this stage, in certain areas, quite effective and successful. I would hate to see pressures brought from the outside onto the centre to justify itself in certain areas.

AUSTRALIA STREET INFANTS SCHOOL

A CENTRE FOR CHILDREN AND PARENTS

BY: Kaye Schofield

1. SUMMARY

* An inner city Sydney infants' school serving an area of transient migrant population and low socio-economic status Australians.

* Programmes focused upon the need to improve child rearing habits amongst all parents.

* Special, informal, low-key programmes for parents and children in the school's "annexe" - Lennox House.

2. DEVELOPMENT OF PROGRAMMES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERACTION BETWEEN THE SCHOOL AND THE COMMUNITY

Community-school interaction programmes at Australia Street have stressed informality and been mostly low-key.

The community around the school is characterised by a high degree of social instability. Newtown was, and is, one of the most disadvantaged areas in New South Wales. The suburb spans three municipalities, (City of Sydney; South Sydney; and Marrickville) which rank as those most at risk in the State, ranking first, second and fourth respectively on the 25 social indicators recently published in the Vinson/Homel Report.

It is a multi-problem area. It would be difficult to exaggerate the severity of the problems facing adults and children living in the area. Physical and health problems are severe. Family instability is widespread. Poverty is widespread. At the 1971 Census, 77.22 per cent of the residents were either born overseas, or had both parents born in a non-English speaking country. Greeks form the largest ethnic group with Yugoslavs being the other large minority group. Lebanese, Turkish, and South American people also form significant minority groups. The residents are transitional. Again, in the 1971 Census, 65.4 per cent of the community had moved at least once in the last five years.

One of the problems facing the school in relation to its community is that of language. The school has had to come to grips with the multi-cultural

neighbourhood that is Newtown. How can amicable relationships be maintained with English-speaking parents if meetings, etc. are conducted in two or three languages? How can any communication be maintained unless there are interpreter provisions at all meetings? However, while the language problem is easily recognised, a more significant one is that of the traditional attitudes of the parents to the institution called 'school'. Their own schooling was often minimal and, in some cases, formal schooling was never experienced. School was, to many, many parents, a "fine and private place" where the "experts", ie. teachers, taught their kids all that was important for kids to know. Parents tend to have a poor self-concept about their ability to contribute to the process of education and to the institution called school: they felt incapable of taking initiatives.

For these reasons the school took the initiatives. Knowledge of the nature of the community meant that considerable thought had to go into developing programmes acceptable to both staff and the community. The starting point would need to be informal, relaxed, undemanding of parents and teachers, based on individual, personal communication between parents and teachers, and not tied to the traditional point of community involvement in the school - the Mothers' Club. Only by a clear analysis of school and community could the staff of Australia Street have reached this decision.

The first form of interaction was suggested by the principal, and eagerly accepted by her staff. All teachers would spend 10-15 minutes in the playground each day before school began - they got to know the parents personally and the parents came to feel that this was their school. Most teachers now know the names of most parents and are able to raise any problems related to the children with the parents as they crop up. This instant feedback process is very much appreciated by the parents and highlights the atmosphere of caring which pervades the school. Each morning, maybe 30 or 40 parents are in the playground, talking to each other and to teachers. In the cases where the language barrier exists, interpreters are called in by teachers, and this too occurs in the playground.

With the communication barrier breaking down, teachers began to invite parents into the classrooms - to sit in classrooms, be with their children, listen to reading, help prepare teaching aids, etc. It is still an informal procedure: parents are not time-tabled to be present but wander in when they have the time. It is also still a small-scale programme - perhaps five or six parents in any one day. But they are coming to re-assess the ways they can contribute to the education of their children and also to their own self-esteem.

Tony McCoy is an example of this. Hard to know his age. Probably younger than he looks, but the hard times have left their mark. His son is at Australia Street. Mum is not around. Tony grew up in the usual way for these parts ... little stability in home-life, grew up in an institution and then in the Merchant Navy and now, in his late twenties, with a small boy whom he is rearing alone. Cannot find a job, and after dropping his son off at school, would pass the day as best he could with limited resources. Jessica Wiltshire, an English as a Second Language teacher, saw that Tony might gain a lot from involvement with the school. So she invited him into the school and he has barely left it since. He teaches the kids soccer; helps in classrooms; works with teachers on community projects, and keeps an eye on the kids. In a hundred ways, Tony makes himself useful. But it would be wrong to see him as someone who does odd jobs around the school. He is recognised by the school as a person with a right to be there and to participate in those decisions which interest him. There was some tension initially as to the sorts of decisions Tony had a right to share. Teachers were unsure as there were no precedents. He wasn't sure how far he could go or wanted to go. What has now emerged, after almost a year, is a recognition by teachers and by Tony that he has a right to participate in those decisions about which he has some expertise. This clarification has set the pattern for general parental decision-making. Decisions cannot be made without information. Australia Street is now embarking on a programme of dissemination of information to parents so that the range of decisions in which they may participate is widened. Perhaps the most important effect of this example of what happens at Australia Street is the contribution the school has made to a member of its community. It has provided Tony with a stability and a feeling of worth. Education here is seen as a life-long process.

The school has also become a focus for some social activity for its local people. Many do not have cars. Many find it hard to get out of Newtown for any length of time. Their experiences are, therefore, limited. Camping sessions are arranged to which some parents go. Because so many parents find it impossible to leave their families overnight, the school arranges a one-day visit to the campers, and half-a-dozen parents travel with teachers for the day. Fetes, barbecues, and concerts do raise money, but their value is largely in that parents and teachers work together to develop and implement a programme. A recent fete, organised by a parental committee, attracted over 200 people - and part of the money raised was set aside for use by parents for future projects. At a school excursion to the zoo, 40 parents joined in, outnumbering teachers ten to one.

Under an Innovations Grant, a community reading programme has recently begun. Half the books will be those which children can take home to read to their parents. The other half, in English, Greek, and Yugoslav, will be for children to take home for their parents to read to them: again, innovatory programmes aimed at both children and their parents.

Australia Street sees itself as a community resource and has developed close links with other community resources to form a system of support for teachers, for parents, and for the kids. Local teacher-training institutions use it extensively beyond the normal practice teaching functions. Architecture students from NSW University have redesigned and will redevelop the entire pre-school section of the school later this year - they will camp in the school over their holidays to get it all completed in two weeks. College lecturers rely on the principal as a resource person and she frequently visits colleges to talk to students. Australia Street believes that it has a responsibility to share its experiences. Organisation at the school is such that these sorts of activities do not interfere with the stability of the school.

After a year of this type of low-key, informal interaction the principal saw the need for more advanced community education programmes. The NSW Department of Education had purchased a tiny terraced house around the corner from Australia Street School, and Diane Barry, the principal, felt that it was an ideal opportunity to provide a community education centre and programmes linked with the school but still independent of it. Lennox House came into being at the end of 1976 and funds were made available through the Disadvantaged Schools Program to provide the necessary refurbishing.

Lennox House is staffed by Gillian McDonald, a former teacher and lecturer in pre-school education, and by Barbara who acts in a variety of capacities from mother figure to interpreter for the Greek community. Lennox House does not have a "Five-Year Plan" type approach to its community: there is no blueprint. What the community sees as its needs will determine what happens at Lennox House. Gillian is acutely aware of the ease with which such places can become institutionalised and is very careful to create an atmosphere rather than a bureaucracy. At Lennox House parents can learn child-rearing techniques which their own upbringing often failed to develop fully.

The toy library, used weekly by over 50 parents, is slowly becoming a focus for parental interest, not only in the selection of toys for their own children, but increasingly in the choice of toys and running it themselves.

Constructive play sessions are held three times each week attended by

about a dozen mothers each time. Parents learn, with Gillian's help, ways to work with their pre-school children through sand or water play. After only five months Gillian handed over the sessions for school holidays to a group of mothers. By that time, they were able to feel that Lennox House was really theirs, and that they had developed enough confidence in themselves to take the initiative. This appreciation of when to hand over responsibility is a vital skill.

There is a need in the Newtown neighbourhood for a place where parents can come together informally for a chat and to support each other. Increasingly, Gillian has found her role function related to the personal problems of those who use Lennox House. Because she is not part of institutionalised welfare parents do not see her as a threat.

Lennox House is also a place for children - pre-school children at this stage - who are being taught by their own mothers in a manner that has spin-offs for the children at Australia Street which could develop further. The House may become a place where kids at the school go on occasions to play with smaller children, and the pre-schoolers may move in and out of the school before they are formally enrolled there.

Recently Jessica Wiltshire has begun English lessons at Lennox House for local people, which is an illustration of the two-way flow between the school and the House and which is a product of informal interaction.

Lots of other ideas are being tested out by Gillian in consultation with the parents. How can Lennox House be a resource for students in a local high school? How can parents, without being pushed, take more initiative? Requests for guest speakers and films are increasing and Gillian uses her expertise to meet these requests.

3. RESPONSIBILITY FOR INITIATION OF PROGRAMMES

About two years ago, in the early stages, the principal, Diane Barry, was the key figure in the development of community-school interaction. She appreciated that if interaction programmes are to develop, they require commitment from the total school and should be able to continue independently of any individual person. For these reasons she arranged formal and informal situations where staff could focus on the question of the relations between the school and its neighbourhood - staff meetings; in-service; social occasions, etc. Soon the staff were able to develop their ideas and contribute to the development of the philosophical base. All staff have contributed to this framework which may be summarised as:

* Parents have a RIGHT to participate in their children's education at any level they choose.

* Education does not end at the exit from the school.

* The school is simply another community resource: it is not special, mystical or separate from the community it serves.

* All staff have a responsibility for community-school interactions: it cannot be made the responsibility of one individual alone.

* Respect is the basis of any relationship. Everyone - parents, pupils, and staff - have a contribution to make. It is the job of the school to recognise this and work in an atmosphere of mutual respect.

The principal has pursued a policy of devolution - staff are encouraged to initiate programmes and Jessica Wiltshire and Gillian McDonald, in particular, have both initiated programmes. The true test will come in the next six months. The principal has been seconded to act as an Innovations catalyst for New South Wales. Yet the staff have been able, even without her, to develop closer interaction with parents. It is one of the criteria for successful school-community interaction programmes that they can be maintained and developed without the initiator. Australia Street shows all the signs that it can and does happen.

4. THE FOCUS AND AIMS OF THE PROGRAMMES

The main objective in all programmes operating at Australia Street is to promote better patterns of child rearing amongst local parents. While the school is very careful not to impose values on parents, there are certain patterns which do require parental modifications of behaviour. An example is the excessive use of corporal punishment, frequently the result of the parents' own upbringing and the product of emotional exhaustion. Communication between parents and their children in this community is often minimal. Many parents have limited knowledge of the process of child development and the processes by which their children learn. It is in these areas that programmes at Australia Street have concentrated.

At first this aim was focused on the classroom. It was anticipated that, by being in the classroom with their child, parents would grow in their understanding of that child and the process of learning. It was soon apparent that a more structured attack on the problem was needed and it was

at this point that the primary focus shifted to Lennox House where developmental programmes, aimed at more effective parenting, could be implemented.

Thus, from the outset, programmes have been aimed at parents' education with subsequent benefits not only for the children at the school but for others in the families involved.

5. STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES ADOPTED

At all points, formal structures and pre-determined processes have been avoided. However, there is a network of interaction set up to provide continuous examination of the relationship between Australia Street and its community.

The formal Mothers' Club meetings have, by parental choice, been abandoned in favour of 'special interest' committees, formed for specific projects: eg. Fete Committee; School Camp Committee; Lennox House Committee, etc. A different group of parents are involved each time. Over 50 parents attend the general community meetings, held at least once a month, often more. Mostly they are mothers, but increasingly, fathers are being involved. Within these meetings, teachers have had, in some cases, opposing views to parents but have conceded to parental wishes despite their own anxieties. In this way the hierarchical structure of formal parent associations, alien to this community, has been by-passed for a more appropriate, flexible structure.

Weekly, informal staff meetings have also been instituted at which parents are welcome. In this way, constant evaluation of programmes is possible, and they can be redirected where necessary.

The school also maintains very close links with the three Schools Commission Programs which have contributed so much to the school. Jessica Wiltshire is a member of the Regional Disadvantaged Schools Committee, and Diane Barry acts as a consultant for the Innovations Program. Both parents and teachers attend in-service courses to ensure the dissemination of new ideas throughout the school, and to maintain the quality of education offered to the pupils of Australia Street. Close liaison with the Central Metropolitan Education Region also has contributed considerably to the programmes, particularly at Lennox House.

6. MAJOR RESPONSIBILITY FOR DEVELOPMENTS

Responsibility has tended to go hand in hand with initiation - those

responsible for the idea also being responsible for the implementation: this responsibility has been largely with the principal, Diane Barry. Gillian McDonald is largely responsible for the developments at Lennox House, together with the State Disadvantaged Schools Committee. But for most developments, responsibility has not been left to a single individual - shared responsibility has tended to be the pattern.

7. PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED AND ACTION TAKEN TO DEAL WITH THEM

Split between three municipal areas, four social security regions, three Commonwealth Employment Service offices, two health regions, two Youth and Community Services regions, and two Australian Assistance Plan offices, it is not surprising that the community had no focus. Therefore, it is very difficult to make contact with parents who do not come up to the school - there is no focal point where the school could go to seek contact with the community. This still poses considerable problems for the staff at Australia Street and Lennox House. It has, however, been partly overcome by a variety of strategies. Teacher aides, appointed under the Disadvantaged Schools Program, were chosen because they had children at the school and would thus be able to influence other parents; some teachers visit parents in their homes to establish and maintain contact with those reluctant to come into the school; local translators are used to ensure that all notes sent home are in the local ethnic languages; interpreter/social workers are asked to visit homes to make an initial contact; attendance by staff at a range of community events, social as well as business oriented - all these ways have effectively been used to break down the barriers between the school and its community.

The second key problem relates to the traditional views held by the community to education and to schools. 'Education is the business of teachers', is the common attitude. Physical change within the school has partly overcome this. Parents had to feel comfortable in the school. Australia Street Infants School today is a joy to enter - thanks to Diane, parents, a committed staff, a lot of imagination, and the Schools Commission Disadvantaged Schools Program. The doors open from a narrow street of tiny terraced houses onto a riot of yellow and green. Displays of kids' work fill most walls. The stairs are filled with plants - somewhat of a novelty in this part of Sydney. It represents a superb approach to providing an environment which, while far more pleasant than much of the community, is not, however, alien to that community. The physical environment of the

school, emphasising light and space rather than 'chic', is a functional space where kids and parents feel at home and which is the product of teacher-parent co-operation and joint activity.

The third key problem particularly affecting the Lennox House programmes, is the reluctance on the part of parents to take initiatives. The community, the bottom of the social scale in terms of income, occupation status, and respect, has found it very difficult to assert itself. Life-long education aims at helping all citizens to acquire the essential information and awareness to exercise control over, and accept responsibility for, their own way of life but this takes more than eight months. The problem is how to bridge the enormous gap between raising awareness levels by providing information, and the next step of parents taking control of their own actions. There are a few instances at Lennox House where the parents are initiating action as well as implementing programmes. They are gradually learning to choose toys for the library and deciding how best they can run play sessions in their own homes. In Newtown this is a revolution

No blueprint has been devised to encourage parental initiative. Gillian assesses the point at which she might withdraw from a situation and allow the parents to assume responsibility. She deliberately stays away from Lennox House on some occasions to allow parents the freedom they need to exercise their own skills. It is a slow process, often a disheartening one, but if life-long education is to have any meaning, an absolutely crucial one.

8. FACTORS IN THE SUCCESS OF THE PROGRAMME

* The energy, drive and imagination of the principal, Diane Barry.
* The commitment from all staff to the philosophy but, in particular, from Jessica Wiltshire and Gillian McDonald.
* Given the lack of focus and social cohesion, the school has been fairly readily accepted.
* The timing of the programmes - coming as they did when there was great support for innovations.
* The support provided, financially and organisationally, through the Disadvantaged Schools Program and the Innovations Program.

9. FUTURE PLANS

As suggested earlier, school-community interaction at Australia Street does not follow a rigid plan. Constant reassessment of the situation occurs, and implementation of any programme depends on the support it has in the community.

Plans are well in hand for a joint programme between Lennox House and Marrickville Girls' High School. It is hoped that senior girls will follow a programme on child development by working within the Lennox House play groups. It is anticipated that this will be functioning at the beginning of 1978.

10. CONCLUSION

An 'open' school is the end goal of those in the school. The critical points along the way will be the extent to which the staff can accurately assess the readiness of the community and the extent to which community-school interaction is dependent upon the initiative and drive of a few individuals.

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GEILSTON BAY HIGH - A SCHOOL IN SEARCH OF ACCEPTANCE

Research and report by: Eva Dunn,
in association with David Pettit

1. SUMMARY

Geilston Bay high school opened in 1972 with the task of developing teaching methods to suit its open plan architecture. It has endeavoured to overcome the disapproval of the community it serves by providing facilities for the public and by mounting a comprehensive public relations programme.

2. PROGRAMMES FOR INTERACTION BETWEEN SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY

(a) Formal

* The Community Liaison Officer

The appointment of Mr Roger Hawkes, a senior master of the staff of Geilston Bay high school to the position of community liaison officer was an event of major significance. The school's relationship with parents had been poor not because the school had not tried but because many parents and other community people were hostile to the school's open plan, its child-centred approach and its inaccessibility to many parents.

Mr Hawkes' first step was to arrange a personal meeting between parents and tutor teachers. Sometime during the year, every parent received an impressive printed invitation to a coffee morning held in a comfortable visitors' room, hosted by Mr Hawkes and the child's tutor teacher. These coffee mornings were held twice weekly so that the groups could be kept small enough for personal contact between parent and teacher. The routine of these mornings included a guided tour of the school. The emphasis was upon forging links between the parent and tutor teacher with a pastoral care role. After making the arrangements Mr Hawkes would back off and encourage the tutors to handle the meeting. On receiving the invitation, even those parents who could not attend felt that the school wanted to know them and valued their support. Parents seemed to appreciate the fact that the school cared about them and that they had not been contacted just because 'something was wrong'. Those who did attend found the discussion lively and honest. Many parents went away feeling happier about the school's methods.

Mr Hawkes has also been responsible for many publications, media

publicity, and community out-reach programmes.

* Spreading the responsibility - the mini-schools

The 1976 community relations campaign made the staff extremely conscious of the importance of parental involvement and of the need to extend the work.

Comprehensive community relations programmes have now become a task for all the staff. The mini-schools have a special role to play and have taken responsibility for much of the liaison carried out by Mr Hawkes. They enjoy a great deal of parental approval: it seems that the parents can identify with the mini-schools more readily because of their small size and individuality. They have parent nights and social functions. Letters are sent home to parents explaining the work and plans for the year and parent response has been good.

* The open nights

To encourage people into the school and create favourable opinions towards it, Bob Hortle, the principal, and his vice-principal, Geoff Page, decided that

> ... as well as inviting parents in as a normal part of a day-to-day programme, we would create one night a week when we would open as many facilities of the school as we thought parents would use.

Geoff Page ran these open nights. The whole of the design area was made available to the public including workshops, kitchens, art and craft facilities. The library was also available. The organisers did not want to duplicate the type of evening classes run by Adult Education nor attract their clientele and so they adopted a more informal approach. People were invited to come in to do any odd job or repair work. Some did just that: others took up a craft like pottery or copper enamelling. Some only stayed for 20 minutes, others for the full five hours. When the Tasman Bridge disaster isolated the Eastern Shore, the facilities and opportunities offered by the school suddenly became more appreciated. The sheer pressure of numbers forced the organisers to restrict attendance to accompanied children and adults and, finally, to adults only.

* Programmes in the community

The Second Chance education project run at Risdon Vale primary school for the women of the area provided an opportunity for Mr Hawkes' community relations:

> I had the opportunity of talking to key people, disseminating information. Children from this school serviced the creche

in the community hall so that mothers could attend the Second Chance project.

He also trained 20 mothers as projector operators, "so that the community resource was multiplied 20 times". In this informal setting and in their familiar surroundings, the women were relaxed and open rather than on the defensive and troubled by feelings of insecurity. One mother typified the problems facing her when discussing her own hazy understanding of subject levels:

> Why do you do Level II? Where will that get you in a job, say, if you went to the Public Service? What could you expect from Level III? I think a lot of parents are too frightened to ask because it sort of shows some ignorance on their part.

In a relaxed environment Mr Hawkes was able to have discussions helpful to parents about this and other problems.

There have been attempts to improve contact with the feeder schools. The music area had taken concert parties to the primary schools and were very popular. At the end of the year, Grade 6 students, together with their parents and teachers, are taken by bus to see their future school. There are exchange visits between those teachers of the two schools responsible for transition at the upper end of the school.

Some children go into the local community to do such things as child minding at the nearby 'Jack and Jill Child Minding Centre', and at the Risdon Vale Second Chance programme. Another group helps with horse riding at the Wentworth Special School for retarded and cripped children.

(b) Informal

The school has, from its opening in 1972, endeavoured to be open to its parents and community. Bob Hortle recalls the earliest efforts:

> I suppose our first big effort was to try and open the school to the parents to come in ... We had advised parents that the school was an open one: the doors would be open to them all the time.

At first, the children were left to guide their parents through the school, but

> ... we found that back-fired because ... they didn't understand what was going on and went away with the wrong impressions. We still continue, but we make sure that when we walk around with them we explain more what is happening, rather than leave them to put their own interpretation on it.

The open door campaign has certainly had a large degree of success. Many parents visit the school and find it welcoming, open, and friendly but too many parents still do not come to the school.

The team of principals, Bob Hortle, Garry Jones, and Geoff Page, co-operate very closely with teachers, parents, and each other in the multiplicity of ad hoc parent-school relations. Garry Jones is the vice-principal. In his dealings with the many delicate situations which daily confront him, his prime aim is to retain the support and involvement of the parent. He sums up his approach this way:

> I hope [the parent sees] that (a) I am interested, (b) I have listened, (c) I have acted, and (d) hopefully achieved some result. So they don't get the brush off or the buck passed ... [despite the fact] that the problems they bring are not necessarily soluble there and then.

It is an approach which exemplifies that of the whole school.

3. SOURCES OF INITIATIVE FOR INTERACTION

There are four major sources of initiative for the Geilston Bay High programmes. In the first instance, the Tasmanian Education Department's decision to build an open-plan school at Geilston Bay and the school's child-centred approach aroused public, especially parental, disapproval which made it necessary for the school to respond, and a major aspect of that response arose out of ideas promoted by a visiting English educationalist.

* The school - architecture, location, and approach

Two new high schools were built in the Hobart area during the early 1970's and were the first with an open-plan architecture. One of these experimental schools was situated at Geilston Bay to serve Geilston Bay, Lindisfarne, and Risdon Vale. Given the new style of plan, it was hoped that the school would develop curricula and teaching methods to fit it. The logic of such a priority is obviously debateable. During those stages of building the staff was given the opportunity to influence design and opted for more flexible areas rather than open space. As student numbers increased the problem of noise became more acute, necessitating more partitions. The net result of the building programme is seen by Bob Hortle in this way:

> ... the building [has] evolved from one which forced us to operate in spaces we didn't like, through to one which is now flexible - still using open spaces, still using team approach, but able also to use streamed groups and streamed approach.

The original staff of this new high school was dedicated to creating a viable alternative to the traditional approach, and to making the school work for the good of this particular community. However, they faced criticism of their child-centred approach from the very beginning, some of the most damaging attacks coming from educators outside the school.

The critics found the media readily accessible, and thus had a great influence on public opinion.

The siting of the school at Geilston Bay also has inherent problems. As the principal commented:

> ... the location of the school has not made it easier for us to involve the local community.

The setting is beautiful, but it is three miles from Risdon Vale where 75 per cent of its students come from. Each day they have to come by bus. Geographic isolation has meant that the Risdon Vale people do not see the school as their school; they do not identify with it. On the other hand, there is some arguable merit in bringing out the Risdon Vale children who, otherwise, would be in a very isolated situation. The remainder of the students come from nearby middle-class Lindisfarne and Geilston Bay.

* The communities and their parents

Risdon Vale is a Housing Commission suburb built in the late 1950's and situated in a dead-end valley about two miles off the main road and four miles from the nearest neighbouring suburb. Few outsiders ever visit it. A high percentage of the population work at the nearby Electrolytic Zinc Company as semi-skilled or unskilled workers; an increasing proportion in unemployed. Apart from a shabby-looking shopping centre, the area has practically no public facilities. A significant minority of people in Risdon Vale is openly hostile to all forms of education: they have failed in the system and they find it irrelevant to their children. But the bulk of the parents is anxiously concerned. They see education as a passport to a good job, for example, a trade or office work. Some are hostile towards Geilston Bay because they see every activity not connected with the 3 R's as jeopardizing their children's future. If a particular child is not doing well, the school gets blamed for failing to keep strict discipline and for not making the child work.

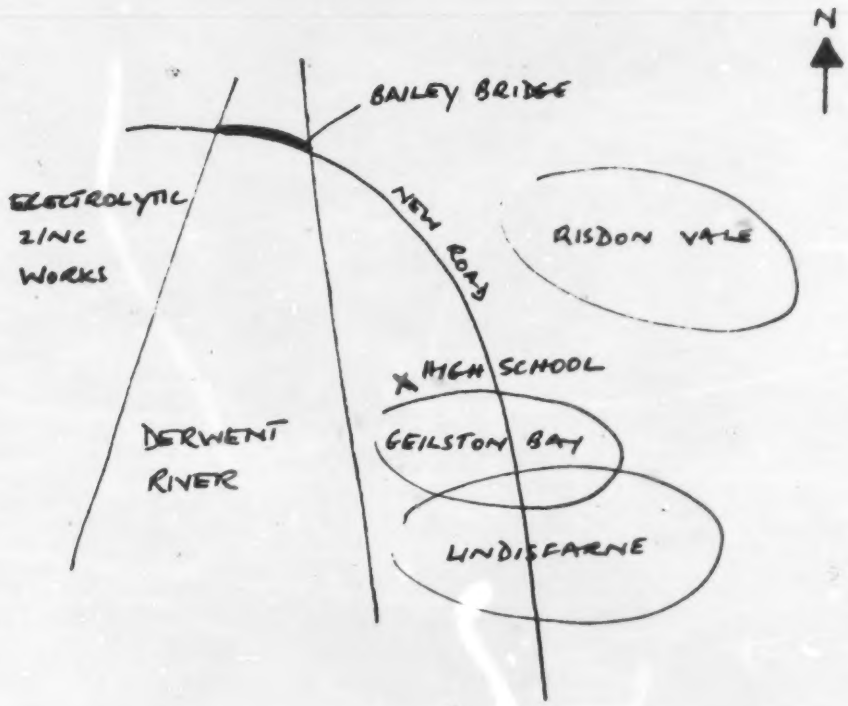
The other quarter of the children come from the immediate neighbourhood of the school, from the comfortable middle-class suburbs of Geilston Bay and Lindisfarne. The parents are better informed and at least admit the possibility that the new methods might work. They have been apprehensive

and critical but, at the same time, also co-operative.

By its very novelty the open-plan made it difficult for the school to gain acceptance with parents. As Roger Hawkes comments:

> [There were] all sorts of fears from people locally about the open plan ... [it was] something the parents and the local community hadn't experienced themselves; therefore worrying, therefore [creating] a sort of communications gap.

At the beginning of each year, large numbers of parents requested the Department to exempt them from the zone, so that their children could attend a traditional high school.



* The school's response

Despite the opposition to open plan and the misunderstanding of the school's child-centred approach, by 1975 a survey showed that 80 per cent of its pupils liked and appreciated their school. This is one of the strongest factors in making the teachers determined not to reorganise the school into a traditional pattern simply to satisfy public pressure. As Roger Hawkes said:

> We had a dilemma ... either we get the children to hate the place or get the parents and inform them what is happening in the school.

As a result the school expanded from its 'openness' to a more positively promotional appraoch, centred on the community liaison officer described above. The idea for such an approach came from an English educationalist, Mr Hugh Cunningham, who came to Tasmania and delivered lectures which seemed very appropriate to the problems at Geilston Bay. Geoff Page and Roger Hawkes invited him to come and talk to the staff at the school. He advised them to, (1) draw up a list of priority goals, and (2) re-examine the school organisation to free a member of the senior staff to deal with the problems with highest priority. The consensus pin-pointed two areas of concern: remedial teaching and public relations. The Department helped out with an additional remedial teacher. By spreading administrative and teaching tasks, Roger Hawkes was freed for his new role of community liaison officer.

4. FOCUS AND AIMS

The initial lack of public acceptance - a combination of hostility to open-plan and child-centred teaching, the social characteristics of the area, and the realisation by teachers that they had to have parent support meant that school-initiated programmes have evolved in response to these needs and problems. The first aim was to make the school's methods, operations, and structure known to the community and to open up its facilities. It was hoped that through knowledge of the school, tolerance and acceptance would follow. Secondly, the school strove to maintain its child-centred philosophy because, in the professional opinion of the teachers, it provided a more enjoyable and rounded education for the children. Thirdly, the very real social problems of the area naturally made themselves felt within the school. Social problems certainly could not be tackled without the co-operation of the parents. And, finally, the staff fully realised that effective education cannot take place unless parents and school pull together. Parents are seen as the main influence on the child.

The prime focus of the school is to enable students to move on to the local matriculation college at Rosny - (in Tasmania, high schools cover the school years 7 to 10: years 11 and 12 are the responsibility of the matriculation colleges) - or, if they leave school, to enter successfully into employment. During the past six years there has been a general trend towards more restricted choice of subjects and the time allotted to them.

The major organisational change has been the establishment of three

mini-schools in the junior grades (7 and 8) to create closer relationships between the students and teachers. The mini-schools enjoy a great deal of autonomy. Generally, it would be true to say that the whole school functions as the co-operative effort of semi-autonomous parts. Senior masters, whether in charge of areas (subjects) or of mini-schools, have a great deal of freedom.

5. STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES

A salient feature of the school is its democratic atmosphere. Everybody associated with the school, whether staff member, pupil or parent, is encouraged to voice opinions and offer suggestions. And, like most democratic institutions which aim to do more than the bare minimum, it needs to convince its members of the value and appropriateness of proposed actions. Thus, before Mr Hawkes could effect the community relations plan, he had to convince all the staff members that the campaign was essential, so that he could rely on their support. Articles were distributed dealing with aspects of school-community relations. After discussions with tutor teachers, Mr Hawkes asked them to write a friendly personal letter to the parents of all their pupils. He said about the letters:

> The majority of staff accepted the idea and, as a result, established a positive relationship with parents early in the year.

The same processes of gaining staff consent are at work now in the mini-schools. The significance of Mr Hawkes' work is that he created networks to the community over and above those that the school could normally have created. Thus, the school published pamphlets and newsletters about its policies and activities. These were given to visitors, sent home to parents, letter-boxed in the community and left on library and shop counters in an attempt to counteract unfavourable and often misinformed public criticism. As Mr Hawkes had previous media experience he exploited his contacts to get the school good television coverage. The local newspaper was always notified about newsworthy items. Most importantly, the staff made certain that published and broadcast criticism was always answered promptly. Many people emphasised that the best way to reach the people of Risdon Vale was to go out and meet them in completely informal settings on their home ground, and the school's association with the Second Chance programme arose from this.

The official link between the school and its parents is the Parents

and Friends Organisation (the P & F). The organisation has been instrumental through the principal in changing school policy. Originally, the students had only three subjects on their Schools Board Certificates: English, mathematics, and science. Although this was done with the approval of employer organisations, the P & F found cases where children seeking jobs were victimized, so they sought the inclusion of other relevant subjects, specifically typing and social science. The P & F also acts as an informal channel of communication between the school and some parents who show a deep aversion to visiting the school. It has attempted to explain the school to parents by having guest speakers and getting staff and children in, during an evening, to show what happens in certain areas of the school and provide the opportunity for teachers to meet parents and discuss issues. The P & F is also a very successful social and fund raising body.

6. MAJOR RESPONSIBILITY FOR DEVELOPMENT

The school climate of openness stems from the principal and his senior staff who have been responsible for both initiating some programmes and, equally important, enabling other people's initiatives to bear fruit, ie. the creation of school priorities at Hugh Cunningham's stimulus that freed Roger Hawkes.

Another example is Ross Ewington whose music area is open to all visitors. Ex-students come in regularly to use the facilities, especially the electronic music equipment. They also come to take classes in their own instruments. Mr Ewington's area is especially attractive to ex-students because they like to bring their problems to him because, as one ex-student said, "he ... realises what is happening to people".

The parents' initiatives through the P & F have led the school to adapt its policies.

7. PROBLEMS

* Communications

Despite all the efforts of the school communication, especially personal communication, is still a major problem. It is difficult to make contact when

> both parents work and you'll find as the husband comes in the back door of an evening, the wife is going out to work, and vice versa.

Written communication is inadequate: a large percentage of duplicated

notices do not reach home. Even if it does get to the parent, it may not be read.

Another communication problem concerns reports. Some parents find the Geilston Bay reports obscure and even misleading. It is the one piece of communication hardly any parent will ignore: as such it must convey clearly the teacher's intended message. At Geilston Bay, the children are assessed in a subjective, child-centred way. If the child works hard within his capacity, he could gain A's and B's. For some parents, especially those with poor contact with the school, these assessments can be miscontrued as an indication of their child's absolute standard or position in class. Parents are anxious to have comparative marks, so that the School Board Certificate may not bring unexpected failures; and this is equally a problem for a school-leaver and entry to work. But comparative marking conflicts with the school's educational philosophy. Said one anxious Risdon Vale mother:

> I am very happy with the school as long as the marks I am getting are a true indication of her work....

* Staff

The teaching staff increased dramatically each year from 1972 as student numbers rose. This, together with natural staff turnover, meant that at the beginning of each year there had to be a concerted effort to create a unified teaching philosophy. In some years, it meant that the 'minority was preaching to the majority'. Young teachers who come mainly from middle-class backgrounds often lack social awareness and nothing in their training prepares them for the practical problems associated with teaching students whose values are not the same as their own. As an ex-student commented of some teachers who have not become involved with the community:

> They are living in a dream world: they're really insulated.

Even more experienced teachers tend to take certain values for granted. One of Mr Hawkes' anecdotes illustrates this point:

> I met this mother at morning coffee who had never been in the school before. Her daughter had some problems so I was especially happy to see her. I thought she had an enjoyable morning. I asked the daughter the next day, 'It is nice to see your Mum here, Mary! Did she enjoy herself?'. 'Oh yes, Sir, Mum said it was beaut', replied the girl, 'but the coffee she said was bloody awful'. It was percolated!

In the eyes of more experienced teachers, those teachers just out of college were insufficiently prepared by their training to fit in with the school's open-plan, flexible approach:

> Teachers, because of their training, because of their background, see as the answer - four walls.

* Finance

The Tuesday open night scheme was initially financed by a one year Schools Commission Innovations Grant. Before the Australian Assistance Program could take over there was a six months break in finance and consequently in the scheme. Many people lost the habit of attendance due to lack of long-term financing.

* Epilogue

> I find my job on many occasions very disappointing and very frustrating ... There are a lot of issues which extend far beyond the capacity of the school to cure, far beyond the capacity of the parents to cure, far beyond the capacity of both parties to cure, but we try.

* FACTORS IN ACHIEVING SUCCESS

Geilston Bay high school has tried very hard to explain its aims and objectives to its parents and to listen to their comments. In the beginning this was forced upon the school by extremely poor levels of parent understanding of the architecture and teaching methods. It had to seek parental acceptance. The school was also an easy target for criticism during the first years of its existence because it did not have successful ex-students to demonstrate the effectiveness of its new style of education. This period is now over, Bob Hortle notes with great relief:

> ... we did get matriculants and ... in this last 12 months [even] with low rate of employment ... our children did better than any other school. In fact, of the last year's leavers, there are only two boys unemployed ... Attitudes, as a result, have started to change towards the school.

Results certainly speak louder than words in allaying parental anxieties. Many fewer parents have applied for exemption from Geilston Bay in 1977. For the first time parents of Grade 7 children seem to be happy about sending them to the school.

The growing numbers of ex-students in the community is Geilston Bay's best assurance for future acceptance. They can be relied on to be forceful advocates of their school.

The concern of the staff guarantees that all avenues will be explored to overcome problems. The school is concerned, is flexible, and is 'open' and willing to adapt. Ex-students come in daily for chats with the staff or to use some equipment. They come in on Tuesday nights too. This provides the school with important feedback.

... not only from Rosny [Matriculation] College. Quite a number of ex-students who are ... employed come in for a yarn ... They tell us all about their job, problems they've got and comment about the background they got here at the school. The result is, again we can adapt ...

9. FUTURE PLANS

By building up school-community relations the school has not created an inexhaustible reservoir of goodwill on which it can expect to feed indefinitely. For this reason, the school plans to continue its attempts to develop and expand its contacts with the parents, building upon its success and responding to problems as they present themselves.

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